

Pool House Precision

Houston architects Curtis & Windham design a classical pool pavilion that also acts as a picturesque garden folly

THE DESIGNS OF HOUSTON ARCHITECTS BILL Curtis and Russell Windham of Curtis & Windham Architects run the spectrum from formal French façades to rustic mountain retreats worthy of a modern-day cattle baron. Sometimes, however, it is those smaller, gem-like projects that truly seem to showcase an architect's skills. Such was the case when a Houston homeowner commissioned Curtis and Windham to rethink the pool house and the back lawn of her historic River Oaks residence.

The stately Southern Colonial home, designed in the 1930s by architect Cameron Fairchild, lacked the proper formal setting to complement the architecture. In addition, in her former residence, the owner and her family had virtually lived outdoors on their loggia year-round. She wanted the new house and poolscape to be a reflection of this same lifestyle.

The two architects, working in tandem with landscape architect Jane Anderson Curtis (former associate curator of the gardens at Bayou Bend),

BY NANCY STAAB PHOTOGRAPHED BY KA YEUNG

devised a new site plan that transformed architecture, garden, and pool into a unified composition.

First, the design team replaced the circular back driveway that ate up the majority of the back lawn with an unobtrusive side driveway. Next, they took out the off-center pool and replaced it with a long axial pool centered like a jewel in the lush lawn. The vertical lines of the new pool give the illusion of greater length to the backyard. A small sunbathing area paved with river rocks and the addition of a discreet hot tub built into the pool itself complete the layout. Arched water jets transform the pool into a fountain feature when custom-made brass nozzles are turned on.

The original garage located on the edge of the property was completely demolished. In its place, the two architects constructed a combination pool house/garage that is positioned at a right angle to the main house to form an L-shaped courtyard. With this new placement, the reoriented pool-house pavilion functions as a dramatic focal point at the end of the long pool axis. The other end of the pool terminates



LEFT: The classical pool pavilion creates a focal point for the back lawn. **ABOVE:** Brick paving, beaded-board ceilings, and relaxed furnishings convert the loggia into an outdoor living room.



in an equally picturesque point—an elliptical garden, which Anderson Curtis filled with a number of native plantings such as star magnolias, lace-capped hydrangeas, and salvaged Texas roses.

While Curtis and Windham approached the pool-house pavilion (with the attached three-car garage) as a functional building, they also envisioned it as an “aesthetic object

in the garden and a classic garden folly.” Taking cues from the main house, they echoed architectural materials and details such as the Ionic columns, arched loggia, brick paving, and chinoiserie railing. “We wanted to elevate the architectural detailing slightly using the same gestures but in a more refined way,” explains Curtis. “Often, folly buildings are more exalted and playful.” Meanwhile, the compact and practical floor plan accommodates a kitchen, changing room, exercise room, and guest room.

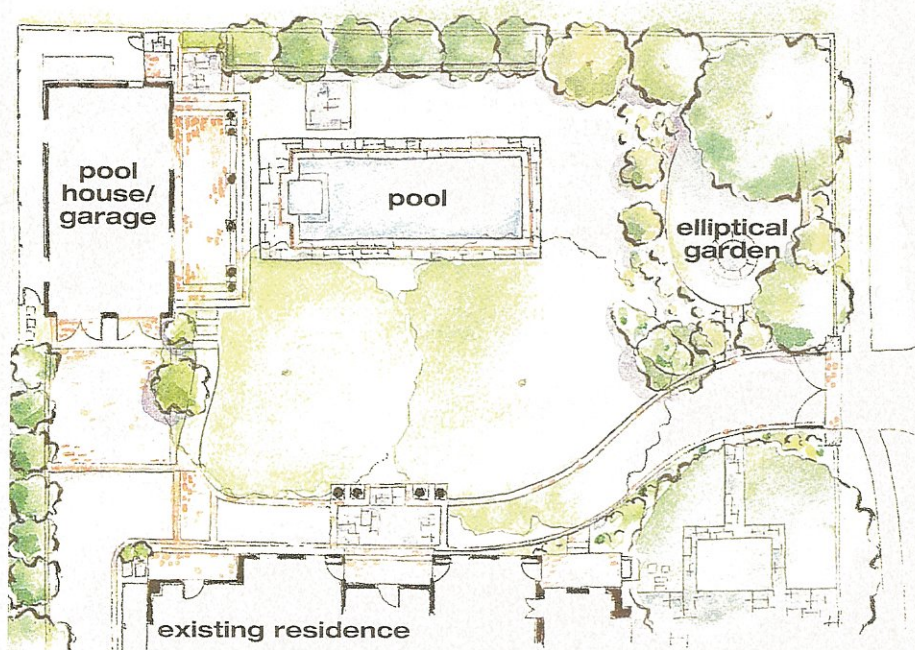
A copper-clad rooftop cupola adds a decorative element “that is appropriate on top of a folly structure,” says Windham. The two architects

Just beyond the gate sits the attached side garage with carriage-door details.



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deftly tucked the attached garage into the back and side of the pool pavilion and suppressed the second-story dormer windows and roofline slightly so that they would not be visible

from the pool-house façade. Lastly, old-fashioned carriage-house doors, Charleston-green trim, and beaded-board details, used for both the garage and the gate entrance, imbue the side

approach with vernacular charm.

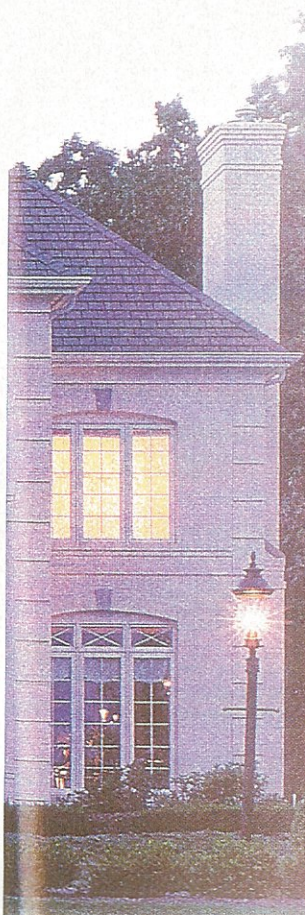
The owners treat the spacious covered loggia of the pool house as an outdoor living room that they can enjoy year-round—whether for swimming breaks, garden parties, or alfresco Sunday dinners. Easy wicker furniture pieces and a colorful, large-scale mosaic propped like a painting over the sofa reinforce the living-room feel.

“We wanted to create a relationship that carried through the back lawn between the main house, the pavilion, and the pool,” says Curtis. As a result, the elongated pool, framed through the arches of the main house and flanked on either end by a classic pavilion and elliptical garden, forms a perfectly symmetrical picture. ♦

For details, see Sourcebook, page 142.

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